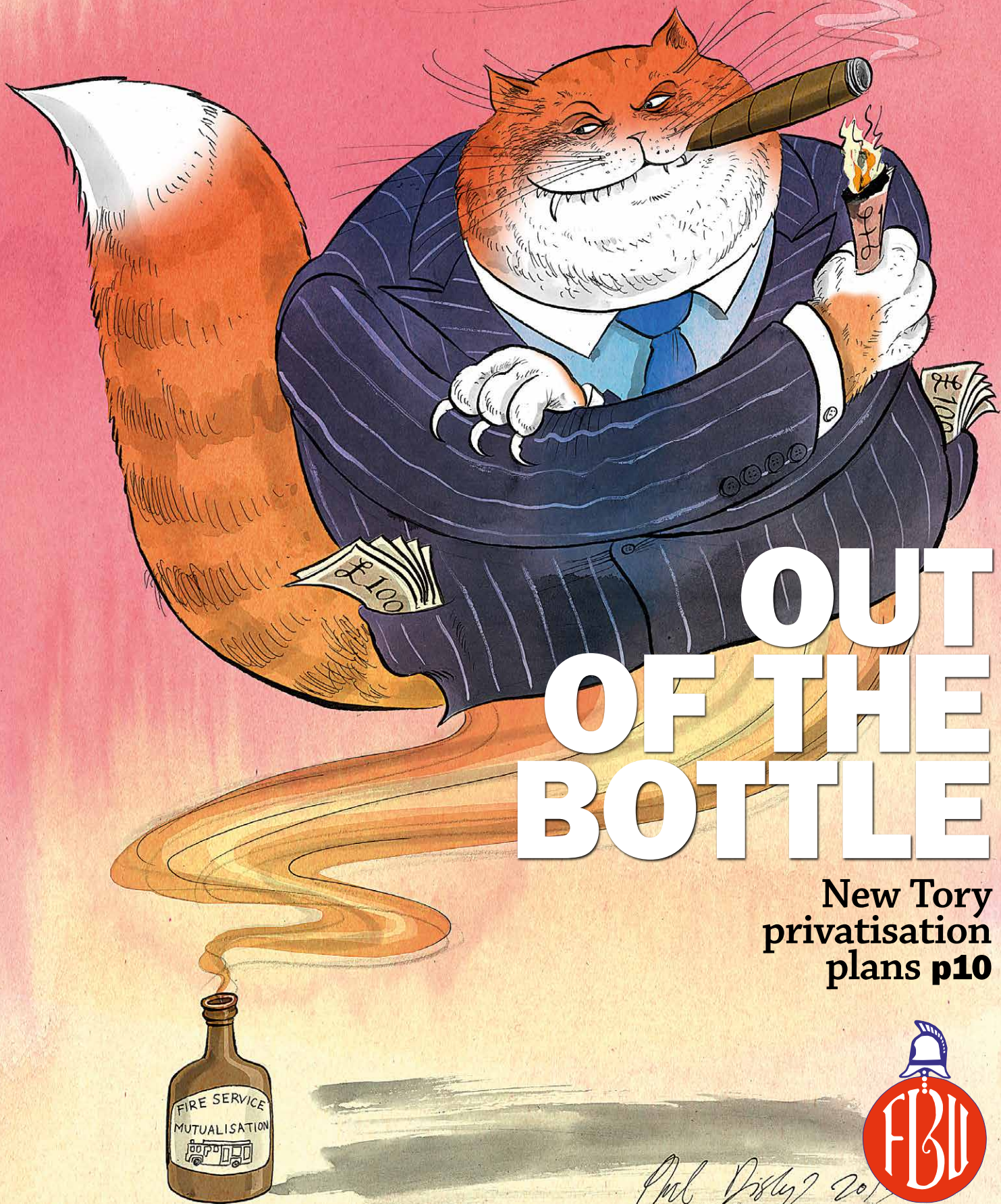


FireFighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union > www.fbu.org.uk

May/June 2013



OUT OF THE BOTTLE

New Tory
privatisation
plans **p10**



Phil Witby 2013





Matt Wrack

A crucial time for all FBU members

Today always seems like the most important time, but right now for our union, many vital matters are coming to a conclusion. These issues will be discussed at our conference later this month and we will provide a report in the next *Firefighter* magazine.

Conference

The conference is the highest decision-making body of the FBU and it sets the priorities for the union in the period ahead. For all the talk in recent weeks after Thatcher's death about what she did to the trade union movement, the FBU remains a highly democratic union where officials at every level are there to represent members and are held to account for the way they do this work.

For this conference, many useful resolutions have been submitted by your brigade committees after careful deliberation locally. The FBU's executive council takes these motions very seriously. It has so far put forward three policy statements of its own.

The first is a motion on firefighter safety, which I know is close to the hearts of our members when they put themselves on the line every day to help others in distress. This year we have seen developments in the court case around the deaths of four of our members in Warwickshire. In addition, we expect to hear shortly the judge's verdict in the latest trial around Marlie Farm.

There are ongoing developments in more recent fatalities at Shirley Towers and Dalry Rd.

Five years ago the FBU published *In the Line of Duty*, the first and so far only comprehensive report into recent firefighter fatalities produced in the UK. This was a serious contribution intended to start a debate within the fire and rescue service and with governments across the UK about prioritising firefighter safety.

However, FBU officials know that much more can be done on the recommendations in the report. We also need to take account of the fatalities and injuries since the report came out. The conference will discuss further work on the vital area.

Priorities

The assault by the government on the fire and rescue service, which includes savage cuts to budgets, attacks on our pensions and efforts to privatise parts of the service, will all be discussed at the conference. The government has further plans

to enforce chaotic mergers, changes to control rooms as well as to revisit issues such as co-responding.

The union wants the conference to take a strategic look at the future of the service and to begin a thorough discussion about our priorities. In the current climate it is a difficult task – but one that we cannot shy away from, given the scale of attacks.

The conference will also discuss further plans to improve the structures of the union. We all know the FBU is the best, indeed, the only real guarantor of firefighters' conditions of service and our professional role. We need to make sure the union is fit for purpose now and going forward, that we spend members' money wisely and we do all we can to protect the gains we have won.

Pensions

The pensions battle continues to animate officials at head office. We are reaching a turning point, something we

have warned of for two years. If the government ignores its own evidence and disregards the professional advice the FBU has provided, then we will have no choice but to take action.

The message I have to members is that as firefighters we really are all in it together. Rest assured that every firefighter, in all duty systems, in every role, whether male or female, whether you are NFPS or FPS or not in a pension scheme – we are all affected by these pension changes. No one is safe from the threat of mass dismissals. Everyone is affected by the contribution increases.

Our union celebrates the diversity of its members, but we also recognise what we all have in common. We need to face this pension challenge together, with a unity born of common experience and of shared conviction. By standing together we stand tall and strong.



Follow the general secretary on Twitter:
@MattWrack



The FBU's campaign fire engine toured south London as part of the campaign to save Downham and New Cross fire stations, threatened as part of mayor Boris Johnson's plan to close 12 fire stations, remove 18 engines and slash 520 frontline firefighter posts

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Ignoring us is not an option

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Firefighting in
West Sussex
and the Amazon



Firefighters at an FBU rally outside the Scottish parliament in Edinburgh, protesting at pension contribution rises devised by Westminster and passed on by the Scottish government

Edinburgh rally against pension changes

Firefighters from all parts of Scotland assembled in Edinburgh on 28 March to show their strength of feeling about the proposed changes to their pension schemes. We estimate that over 350 FBU members attended. This was a very impressive show by members and something that politicians cannot ignore.

The rally outside the Scottish parliament at Holyrood was held in good spirits with a great turnout and was a credit to the FBU. There was an opportunity for members to discuss the issue with MSPs who came out to meet the crowd.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack told the rally that the idea of experienced members who had paid in high pension contributions for years only to face "capability dismissal" for failing a fitness test in their late 50s was unacceptable.

FBU national officer Sean Starbuck told the rally: "We are facing a pension scheme which is unworkable, unsustainable, unaffordable, unfair and has a pension age people cannot work to. Ignoring us is not an option. The choices are that they listen to us, and that is out of our hands, or we ballot for national strike action."

FBU Scotland secretary John Duffy said dismissing older firefighters because of fitness tests was "not acceptable" and the union was not backing off until the issue was addressed.

The rally also heard speakers from the Scottish Police Federation, Labour MSP Ken Macintosh and the SNP's Roseanna Cunningham, minister for community safety, and justice secretary Kenny MacAskill.

Roddy Robertson, FBU executive council member for Scotland

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STEFANO CAGNONI

Campaign turning point

Pensions

The FBU's pension campaign entered a new stage last month, when a law introducing the normal pension age of 60 for firefighters went through parliament. The Westminster government's Public Service Pension Bill was completing its final stages as *Firefighter* went to press.

Clause 10 of the Bill imposes a normal pension age of 60 on firefighters, as well as the police and armed forces.

Control staff and other public sector workers have had their normal pension age raised to the state pension age, which is currently 65 but will rise to at least 68 in the coming years.

The "normal pension age" is the earliest age at which a pension scheme member is entitled to receive benefits (without actuarial adjustment) on leaving the service.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: "Our pension campaign has reached a new turning point. The FBU tried to get MPs and Lords to amend this law so that the normal pension age of 60 was not imposed. Ministers certainly heard the arguments, but they did not appear to listen.

"However, there is still the need for political engagement. National FBU officials are continuing to meet with ministers and civil servants to put our case. The government has still not responded to its own review, which was published back in January and which clearly shows that most existing firefighters will not be fit enough to work safely to 60.

"The review also made it clear that a significant number of firefighters – a majority according to the government's own figures – face the prospect of capability dismissal under the new scheme that is due to come into operation in 2015.

"It is important for FBU members to speak to MPs, local councillors and other interested parties to explain that the government's current proposals are unfair to firefighters, will wreck our pension scheme and disrupt the fire and rescue service."

FBU members have received standard replies from MPs – like the one on page 12 – which fail to acknowledge the evidence provided by the union.

Wrack added: "This union has taken a professional approach during this attack on our pensions. We are ready at any time to negotiate with the government. But we cannot ignore the flaws in their current proposals.

"Doing nothing is not an option for the FBU. Members should continue to press politicians and explain why they are wrong. We also have to prepare ourselves to take action if they won't listen."

Ricky Tomlinson (right) with Des Warren (left) in 1975



Crew given hour to quit in dead of night

Cuts

Welsh firefighters were ordered to empty their lockers and leave their station with an hour's notice in the middle of the night as a result of downgrading plans.

The FBU has condemned cuts and shift changes in Mid and West Wales, which saw Llanelli fire station downgraded to self-rostered (day crewing plus) crewing, despite repeated objections by the FBU and the local MP, Welsh Assembly member, fire authority members and town council.

Barrie Davies, FBU brigade secretary in Mid and West Wales, said: "The county commander entered the station just before 11pm with no prior warning and gave the duty watch one hour to empty their lockers

and ordered them to stand down from duty from midnight. Our members had to leave the station in the dead of night halfway through their last shift.

"We fully expected the service to allow the crew the dignity of completing their last shift with a senior officer meeting them at 9am to thank them for all their years of service. Some members had worked there for 25 years plus. This did not happen.

"FBU officials went into the station to voice our disappointment at the treatment of our members, only to be told by the assistant chief fire officer and county commander: 'We said we were changing the shift pattern on 8 April, we just didn't state what time that would be'."



Local MP Nia Griffith joined a rally to mark the last day of the old shift system in April

Firefighters from threatened station save woman's life

Cuts

The FBU has called on the mayor of London to abandon plans to shut 12 fire stations after firefighters from one of those stations saved the life of a woman trapped in a fire with just seconds to spare.

Engines from Plumstead and Woolwich fire stations were mobilised to a flat fire in March. The engine from Plumstead was caught in traffic, meaning that the

engine from Woolwich – which is earmarked for closure – arrived first.

Firefighters entered the property in breathing apparatus and located an unconscious female casualty in a back bedroom. They pulled her to safety before administering first aid. A further five minutes passed before the engine from Plumstead arrived.

Paul Embery, FBU regional secretary for London, said: "This

incident illustrates why Boris Johnson's plans are utterly reckless. Crews from Woolwich performed magnificently, and their speed and professionalism saved the woman's life with seconds to spare. I have absolutely no doubt that this woman would have died if Woolwich fire station had already closed.

"We call upon the mayor to abandon his dangerous proposals. It is not too late to do the right thing."

SOUNDING OFF

Ricky Tomlinson appeals to FBU members to demand the truth behind jailing of union activists

I am writing to ask you to sign my Downing Street e-petition. The deadline for signatures is 27 June, so please sign right away. We need 100,000 signatures.

You know me as an actor and performer today, but as a young man I was a plasterer working in the building industry and a member of the T&GWU. We were low paid and had some of the worst working conditions of any workers in Britain in the 1970s.

Like any good trade unionists we decided we would take action to change this. We had a national strike in summer 1972. We picketed sites that were not well organised and where union members needed our support. Five months after the strike ended, 24 of us were arrested out of the blue and six of us were sent to prison after lengthy trials at Shrewsbury Crown Court.

I was sent to jail for two years for carrying out trade union activities. Today you do not hear of trade unionists in Britain being sent to prison, but that's what happened to me and five of my colleagues. Others got suspended prison sentences.

Please sign my e-petition to demand the release of government documents. We believe that they show that there was government interference and manipulation in bringing the prosecutions. The coalition government today continues to refuse to release these documents on grounds of "national security". There's a lot more information on the campaign's website.

Ricky Tomlinson

Link to the petition:

<http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/35394>

The Shrewsbury 24 campaign

www.shrewsbury24campaign.org.uk



The campaign is holding a fringe meeting at the FBU's conference in Blackpool.



Michael
Nicholas:
re-elected



Lud
Ramsey:
increase
diversity

Morale boost as young trade unionists speak out

Campaigning

The TUC young workers' conference is a chance for young trade unionists to meet and discuss the issues facing many young people in our society today, including youth unemployment, unpaid internships, affordable housing and the national minimum wage for young people.

As a branch representative it is morale boosting to see other young trade unionists share the same passion and drive for trade unionism.

Members of the wider trade union movement hold the Fire Brigades Union in high esteem, as I found at this conference. They appreciate the history of our union, the hard work and sacrifice many of our members have endured to ensure the best possible working terms and conditions of our employment.

This fondness from the future general secretaries and national officers from all the trade unions present made me feel more confident and I must admit I felt proud rather than fearful and timid to say I was a trade unionist.

Anyone who fears the worst for the future of all trade unions need not worry. With an increase in social media, it is clear to me that the next generation of young people are talking about politics and trade unions. They are organising and most are already filling the shoes of branch representatives in their place of work.

Please show solidarity by supporting these young people, so that we can look the new men and women of the fire service in the eye before we retire to say that we honestly did our best as trade unionists to better the living standards of all firefighters.

David Pitt, West Midlands

Time for a fightback

Equalities

Michael Nicholas, Lud Ramsey and Rico Temple represented the FBU at the TUC's black workers' conference in London in April.

The FBU's motion on black and ethnic minority representation in the workplace, moved by Michael Nicholas, was passed unanimously. Lud Ramsey spoke on a motion calling for increased diversity at senior levels. Michael Nicholas was re-elected to the TUC race relations committee. Other motions discussed ranged from the impact of public sector cuts on black workers

and communities to calls for action on racism and inequality. All motions were agreed.

Guest speakers included TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady. Roger McKenzie, UNISON assistant general secretary, reminded delegates of working class experience under Thatcher and the return of some of those conditions within today's society. He posed the question: "When are black communities going to fight back against the inequality and injustices of this Tory-led government?"

Michael Nicholas
BEMM national secretary



Friendly: The FBU women's school in session

Armed and confident after school

Equalities

The 2013 FBU women's school timetable was, as ever, jam-packed with workshops, group work and speakers. But while the timetable is full, participants do not feel under pressure because the school is so friendly.

Helen Harrison, FBU national women's committee member for the West Midlands, led the first morning session, empowering us to re-write a better maternity policy, like the one she helped introduce in Staffordshire.

Helen Hague, an amazingly

enthusiastic freelance journalist, shared her vast knowledge of working for the media. We learnt the skills to run campaigns, focusing on the current cuts to fire service funding.

After FBU general secretary Matt Wrack addressed the school we had the opportunity to ask questions which centred on the current pensions crisis, the equality agenda and where the equality sections sit in today's FBU.

Guest speakers were Marian Whittington from the Women's Health Information and Support Centre and Keeley

and Meera from Sheffield Rape & Sexual Abuse Counselling Service. They delivered an alarming account of the vital work they carry out.

This linked well with the resolution that the women's committee is taking to the national FBU conference about raising awareness of rape and getting involved in campaigns to help raise the conviction rates for perpetrators.

Every year the school arms me with information and confidence so that I can become more involved in the union. Count me in for next year.

Melanie Smith, Cleveland



The borough of Southwark, which owns Lakanal House, is facing the loss of a third of its appliances and a quarter of its stations

Lessons must be learned from tragic London fire

FBU assistant general secretary Andy Dark outlines the systemic failures that led to a fatal fire in south London

Lakanal House

The FBU has urged fire authorities and the government to learn the lessons of the Lakanal House fire in which six people died and warned that cuts to the service will undermine efforts to prevent similar tragedies in the future.

The union responded as the coroner's inquest verdict was published just before Easter.

Lakanal House, like many similar buildings around the country, underwent alterations over the years, with little regard for ensuring that fire protection standards were maintained and improved. The fire showed the need for maintenance

and continuous improvement in the fire protection systems of buildings.

The fire also demonstrated the importance of introducing a high-quality risk assessment process for such buildings, coupled with rigorous and frequent inspection of high-rise buildings by the fire and rescue service. It is appalling that the fire risks at Lakanal House had never been properly assessed.

One-day training courses

To assess the risk of fire in a complex high-rise residential building, a person needs a good knowledge of fire protection systems and the behaviour of fire. The appropriate level of knowledge cannot be obtained on a one-day training course and London Fire Brigade should not have been selling such courses to people who were assessing fire risk in other high-rise buildings in Southwark.

Clear and unambiguous evidence was presented to the inquest that the household fire safety leafleting campaign,

which fire services up and down the country have introduced as a substitute for fire cover, was totally ineffective.

The fire service across the UK has been decimated over the past ten years. Government cuts and the failure of chief officers and fire authorities to join the FBU to defend our vital service means that we are stretched to the limit.

Peckham fire station, the closest to Lakanal House, is set to lose a fire engine if the mayor of London imposes his cuts. The borough of Southwark, which owns Lakanal House, is due to lose a third of its appliances and a quarter of its stations. Cuts like these will slow response times and lead to more deaths and injuries at fires.


The FBU has consistently protested against the government's abandonment of standards and its lack of scrutiny of the fire and rescue service.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) says a lot about bin collections, while abandoning the fire service and public safety.

VIEW

FROM THE
AERIAL LADDER
PLATFORM

OVER 670,000
HIT BY BEDROCK
13,000 MILLIONAIRE
GET A TAX



A voice for the vulnerable

Protests at ministers' million pound mansions

Hundreds of people are protesting over the bedroom tax, which cuts housing benefit to people living in housing association and council properties who have a "spare" bedroom, and the cap on benefits.

Protesters targeted welfare minister Lord Freud's £1.9m home while disability activists staged a protest at work and pensions secretary Iain Duncan Smith's country mansion in Buckinghamshire — worth more than £2m.

The protest was organised by UK Uncut, the anti-cuts direct action network, who promised to bring resistance to the homes of high-profile politicians pushing the cuts. Lord Freud, the Tory peer and former investment banker, has spearheaded the bedroom tax, cuts to the welfare state and the introduction of universal credit benefits. He has an eight-bedroom mansion in Kent.

Disabled People against the Cuts presented Iain Duncan Smith with an eviction notice at his five-bedroom, 16th century house in Swanbourne that includes a swimming pool. Duncan

Smith has presided over the implementation of unprecedented cuts to the welfare state, which are hitting disabled people particularly hard. Some 17,000 blind people will be hit by the bedroom tax. Houses are likely to have been specially adapted and blind people are particularly isolated if they are forced to move to new areas where they do not know how to get around.

UK Uncut supporter Sarah Knight said: "My mum has just found out that she will have to pay the bedroom tax. My family is terrified about what's going to happen.

"People's hearts are being broken as this government is turning Thatcher's wildest dreams into a nightmarish reality.

"I am too young to remember Thatcher as a prime minister, but people like me are having our childhoods and now adult lives decimated by this government that continues to punish poorer people to improve the lives of the rich — the bedroom tax is the latest example of this. We are resisting these devastating cuts, showing we will not stand for it."

Members of UK Uncut display a banner at King's Cross station in London where 300 protesters gathered to travel by Tube to the house of work and pensions secretary Iain Duncan Smith



Government plans revealed



The government says claims that it wants to privatise the fire and rescue service are scaremongering. *Firefighter* looks at the record



Since the Tory-led coalition government came to power, the FBU has been sounding the alarm about its plans to privatise the fire and rescue service. Just as when the union said the FiReControl project to centralise control rooms could not succeed, our warnings have come early. This time the government should listen before it makes another mess.

The union warned about the *Open Public Services* White Paper that recommended in July 2011 that the fire and rescue service should be excluded from a list of core services to remain free at the point of use.

An update to the White Paper in March 2012 made the threat explicit: "Public service mutuals are now well established ... and we are looking to go further, in areas such as youth services, probation services, children's centres, and fire and rescue services."

The FBU's special conference in 2012 warned that mutuals represent a specific threat in the current situation. In particular, they may play the role of stalking horse for further privatisation and may be a prelude to more opening-up to the private sector in the future.

Senior managers of Cleveland Fire Brigade have been leading the charge for mutualisation in the fire and rescue service. The brigade has set up a community interest company and a social enterprise company to attract "alternative" funding from local industry.

Last September, Cleveland chief fire officer Ian Hayton announced his intention to create a mutual for the whole of the fire and rescue service.

Cleveland Fire Brigade received £95,000 from the government's Mutual Support Programme. Cabinet Office minister Francis Maude gloated: "If a fire brigade can spin itself out as a mutual business, it shows there are few no-go areas of public service where this innovative approach to delivery cannot reach."

FBU Cleveland brigade secretary Dave Howe warned that: "The drive towards some form of mutual fire and rescue service is a senior management-driven initiative aided and abetted by an army of government-funded consultants."

The truth

The FBU's worst fears were confirmed earlier this year when fire minister Brandon Lewis wrote to an obscure Westminster committee that normally deals with uncontroversial legislative matters to ask if it would rush through a change in the law.

Lewis wrote to the Regulatory Reform Committee on 23 January seeking its views on proposals to "enable fire and rescue authorities in England to contract out their full range of services to a suitable provider".

The briefing note sent with the letter said that "fire and rescue authorities should be able to adopt alternative models for delivery, under contract, for some or all of their services by a suitable alternative provider e.g. a mutual, social enterprise, or other appointed contractor". The "should" indicates that the government favours breaking up the current

system, while "contractor" is a euphemism for a private sector provider. Its briefing said Cleveland was a "pathfinder in the fire sector" – meaning that Cleveland is being used as a Trojan Horse for an army of privatisers.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: "These proposals are grotesque and, if they come to fruition, will sacrifice lives on the altar of profit. They let the privatisation genie out of the bottle and we will oppose them vigorously."

In denial

In March this year Mr Hayton told the *Hartlepool Mail*: "It would be absolutely wrong to suggest that a public sector (employee-led) mutual is privatisation and it is mere scaremongering to suggest so."

Fire minister Brandon Lewis told parliament on 18 March that the claim that "the government are privatising, or seeking to privatise, the fire service is completely untrue".

Local government secretary Eric Pickles told the *Northern Echo* on 20 March: "Let me be absolutely clear. We will make no move, directly or indirectly, that involves the privatisation of the fire service."

"It is not our intention, nor will we allow, private firms to run the fire service. If that means we cannot move on mutualisation, we will not move on mutualisation – if that means privatisation of the fire service. Have I left any room for manoeuvre?"

The union opposes privatisation and mutualisation

Despite the emphatic denial, few believe that the threat of privatisation has gone away.

Labour shadow local government minister John Healey said in response to the Lewis letter: "Firefighting is a no-go area for privatisation. The first and last concern of our fire services must be public protection not company profit."

Labour shadow fire minister Chris Williamson told the House of Commons in March that: "Nobody believes the fire minister when he says he has no plans to privatise the fire and rescue service. After all, the Conservative party has form on this."

Even the Chief Fire Officers' Association has written to ministers to echo the FBU's concerns that private providers would prioritise profit over safety and that privatisation would threaten national resilience.

The FBU is clear. The union opposes privatisation and mutualisation. Our Cleveland members agree – a mass meeting involving half the brigade in March voted overwhelmingly against the proposed mutual.

Wrack said: "This is not an employee-led local initiative. It's simply a cost-cutting measure. Firefighters in Cleveland and elsewhere have told the FBU they do not want privatisation, they do not want mutualisation and they do not want contracting out."

"There is no support among firefighters for these measures. The government should stop now before they do untold damage."

Avoiding the argument

Firefighters across the UK have written to MPs about the Westminster government pension proposals, which include the imposition of 60 as the normal pension age (NPA) for all firefighters from 2015.

Most MPs' replies avoid the central argument put by the FBU: that most firefighters will not be fit enough to work to 60 – and therefore face the prospect of capability dismissal before getting to retirement.

Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary, said: "The FBU will continue to seek discussions with ministers to resolve this dispute. We want our members to write back to MPs, asking them to stop messing about and address the substantial issues we've raised on behalf of firefighters' pensions."

1 The government's current proposals are unaffordable, unsustainable and unfair. They ignore its own evidence that an NPA of 60 is unworkable.

2 The proposed final agreement was not agreed by the FBU and so cannot be either "final" or an "agreement".

3 The NPA of 60 was imposed in the NFPS. No medical evidence was provided to show that firefighters could work to this age. Instead, the government promised there would be redeployments. These jobs do not exist in the service today.

4 The government's own report actually found that 66% of current firefighters are not fit enough to work to 60. It suggests that perhaps 85% will not make it. That makes an NPA of 60 unworkable.

5 The government report says that individual firefighters may be able to work longer if they are recruited at much higher fitness levels, maintain a healthy lifestyle and are lucky enough to stay injury and illness free. If not, it's leave without a pension or face the sack.

6 The FBU has explained this evidence to government – so far the union has not received any satisfactory arguments against it.



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Local Government

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www.gov.uk/dclg

Our Ref: ER/BL/003971/13
Your Ref: JAMH22777

11 February 2013

Dear John,

Thank you for your letter of 28 January to the Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP, enclosing correspondence from Matt Wrack, General Secretary of the Fire Brigades Union, about the report on the Normal Pension Age. I am replying as the Fire Minister.

The FBU has also written to me directly and I have met with them to discuss the issues set out in the report, which was commissioned by the Department. The Government's objective is to put in place new public service pension schemes that are **affordable**, **sustainable and fair**. A proposed **final agreement**, published in May 2012, set out proposed reforms to the firefighters' pension scheme in England to apply from April 2015. This set out that the **Normal Pension Age for firefighters will be 60**, which is in line with current arrangements for members of the New Firefighters Pension Scheme 2006.

The report found that a **significant proportion** of firefighters will maintain operational fitness until age 60, provided that they are **sufficiently fit** when recruited and maintain their body mass index and physical activity levels as they age. However, I know that the FBU do not share this view and I am **considering** the points they have made.

The report also contains recommendations in recognition that some firefighters may not be able to work until age 60, which I am **also considering**. The proposed final agreement already allows firefighters to access their 2015 pension scheme benefits from age 55 with **an actuarial reduction**. However, in recognition of trade unions' concerns, the Government has **proposed enhanced retirement arrangements** for active scheme members who are age 57 and over. Furthermore, not every firefighter will have to work until age 60 to receive a full pension. The proposed final agreement sets out **significant transitional protections for current serving firefighters that are closest to their Normal Pension Age**.

BRANDON LEWIS MP

7 The report recommends that the government protect firefighters, men and women, currently in the job. But so far the government has not come forward with any proposals.

8 The current proposed actuarial reduction from 55 would slash up to 65% from a firefighter's pension. That is not fair, when the NPA is unworkable. No further proposals have been made.

9 Even the enhanced retirement proposal depends upon firefighters being able to work until 57 while the report shows most cannot. Only those who are lucky enough to stay fit until 57 will get the option of leaving with less of a reduction in pension. Currently even these will lose up to 15%.

10 No one is safe, even within transitional protection. Fitness tests will mean any firefighter – whatever their role or duty system, whatever pension scheme or none – can be sacked. The protection doesn't protect members from this real threat.

This reply from fire minister Brandon Lewis to one MP who did pursue the FBU's concerns contains a wealth of misleading and contentious assertions that are highlighted and debunked in the panels alongside the letter

ALL IN IT T

Last month the Westminster government imposed increases in pension contributions on firefighters. *Firefighter* estimates the cost

The Westminster government imposed pension contribution increases in April as part of its plans to plug the hole in government finances caused by its friends in the City.

None of the additional money will go towards improving firefighter pensions. This is a straightforward revenue-grab, hitting all public sector workers.

This year's increase is identical to government proposals set out in *Firefighter* in March.

Members of the Firefighters' Pension Scheme (FPS) will pay 1.3% additional contributions or 12.9% of pensionable pay per year. Some middle managers face a 1.9% increase to 13.7% of pensionable pay.

Members of the New Firefighters' Pension Scheme (NFPS) will pay 0.8% additional contributions or 9.6% of pensionable pay per year. Some middle managers face a 1.9% increase to 10.5% of pensionable pay.

The government says it plans further increases for both schemes from April 2014 – with a new basic

The FBU has told the government to think again before it wrecks firefighters' pension schemes

contribution of 13.2% from 2015 – which hits NFPS members especially hard.

The government has ignored its own evidence on contributions. It claims a tiny percentage of firefighters have opted out because of these increases. Asked to stand up these figures, it told the FBU that, in fact, 25 out of 101 new wholetime entrants between April and December 2012 did not join the NFPS – a 25% opt out.

FBU national officer Sean Starbuck said: "This is a damning indictment of these increases. The FBU told the government to think again before it wrecks firefighters' pension schemes. We will continue to make our case to them."

WHOLETIME FIREFIGHTER IN THE FPS

New pension contributions

2013–14: 12.9%

Additional contributions since 2011–12:

Annual £539

Monthly £45



TOGETHER

HOW WILL IT AFFECT YOU?



WHOLETIME FIREFIGHTER IN THE NFPS

**New pension
contributions
2013-14: 9.6%**

**Additional contributions
since 2011-12:**

Annual £313
Monthly £26



RETAINED FIREFIGHTER IN THE NFPS (£10,000)

**New pension
contributions
2013-14: 9.6%**

**Additional contributions
since 2011-12:**

Annual £110
Monthly £9



STATION MANAGER IN THE FPS (INC 20% FLEXI)

**New pension
contributions
2013-14 13.5%**

**Additional contributions
since 2011-12**

Annual £1,206
Monthly £101

Economist Michael Roberts explains how failed government austerity policies and deeper weaknesses in the economy have us heading for a lost decade

Downgrading Osborne, degrading Britain

JOHN STURROCK/REPORTAGE.CO.UK

STEFANO CAGNONI/REPORTAGE ARCHIVE/REPORTAGE.CO.UK



The UK's finance minister – or as we call him in medieval terms, the Chancellor of the Exchequer – George Osborne presented his 2013 budget for public finances in March.

He had to admit that his main targets, of eliminating the annual budget deficit and reducing the government debt ratio by 2015, could not be met. Now he has put the date for meeting them back yet another year. The Chancellor's "austerity" plan is failing.

The stark reality of the British economy is revealed in the figure for national income: stagnation. As in other capitalist economies, recovery has been weaker in the UK after the great recession than in any other recovery from previous slumps.

So Osborne has had to admit that annual government borrowing will rise this year, not fall, as the government reduces its forecast for economic growth. The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) now forecasts real GDP growth of just 0.6% for 2013, down from the

1.2% forecast in December. There were big upward revisions to the borrowing forecasts. The OBR said Osborne's promise to have debt falling as a proportion of national income would not now happen until 2017–18, two years later than planned. Indeed, in 2015, of the 34 member states of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the UK will have the worst budget deficit as a percentage of GDP!

What is the Chancellor's answer? Not to reduce the cuts in public spending, not to lower the overall burden of

taxes and charges on average householders but, on the contrary, to increase austerity measures.

Sure, there have been reductions in tax rates for corporations. Osborne boasted in his speech to parliament that the UK had cut corporation tax on profits more than any other major country. Income tax thresholds will be raised in 2014 to take poorer households out of income tax. But the gains from these tax cuts go disproportionately to the richest earners.

Lowest paid hardest hit

The last VAT increase will cost the lowest-paid workers four times more than any gain from the £10,000 personal allowance, according to the TUC. By the time of the next election, low-paid workers with an average weekly income of £196 will be losing up to four times more per year from the government's increase in VAT in January 2011 than they will gain from the raising of the personal tax allowance to £10,000. The gain from the tax allowance would be £1.09 a week, but the loss from the VAT

The real cause is the failure of the 'rentier' economy that is British capitalism



MPs demand inquiry into HBOS directors' 'bonuses for going bust'

Fall in manufacturing fans UK triple-dip recession fears



Enterprise zones struggle to boost jobs



increase is £4.26 a week.

The government is sticking with austerity and it is not working. But let's be clear. Austerity is not the only or even the main cause of the stagnating economy. The real cause is the failure of the "rentier" economy that is British capitalism.

Productivity in productive sectors of the economy is stagnant and investment has collapsed. Holders of capital are accumulating cash, sending it abroad or buying financial assets. But they are not investing. So the real economy stagnates and the authorities can do nothing about it because the capitalist sector dominates. Government debt is being downgraded as Britain's public sector is being degraded.

The reason that UK companies are not investing at home is that corporate profitability is still well below its peak in 2007 and, even more significantly, the rate of profit in the productive sector of the economy, manufacturing, continues its steady decline from 1997 and is now hitting lows not seen since the recession

BOOM AND BUST: The eighties – with the Conservative policies of a 'big bang' in the City and the deliberate destruction of British industry – started the slide toward today's stagnating economy

of the early 1990s.

UK companies are on an investment strike and business investment as a share of total profit is near its all-time low.

Instead of investing in the British economy, British companies are investing abroad or paying higher dividends to shareholders or buying back their shares to boost share prices. This is the reason why the easy monetary policy of the Bank of England, whether it is near-zero interest rates or massive buying of government and corporate debt from the banks (quantitative easing, "QE"), is not working to boost growth.

There is desperate talk among mainstream economists urging the introduction of negative interest rates or that the Bank of England should target "nominal GDP growth" rather than inflation. But neither of these measures will work if capitalists do not want to invest. Britain is a distorted rentier capitalist economy that is oriented towards unproductive investment and away from investment to increase resources and away from social need.

Distorted economy

George Osborne and the coalition government continue to feed that distorted economy to attract financial investment with corporate tax cuts paid for by reducing welfare spending, decimating public services, eating away at the health service and state schooling and starving productive sectors of funds, while British companies send their profits abroad for better returns.

This is a lost decade.

Michael Roberts blog:
<http://thenextrecession.wordpress.com>

COMPENSATION

Negligent employers have to pay

Emergency service workers are at risk of injury at any time during work and training, not just at the moment when they are saving a life

Compensation

The FBU has responded robustly to recent media attacks on the right of public sector workers to compensation when injured at work. The gutter press and even some broadsheets have been dredging up every trivial case to lampoon public sector workers in what is clearly another softening-up exercise before another government-inspired attack.

In reply, the FBU has argued strongly that firefighters who are injured at work are entitled to and should seek compensation. Such injuries can be very serious and the union has highlighted the details of some recent successful claims for compensation.

These include firefighters who were poisoned by *campylobacter* bacteria during a water-training course in Nottingham which required them to be submerged for long periods. Several FBU members became ill with serious stomach complaints. Some will suffer lifelong bowel problems as a result.

Another case involved a firefighter who broke his ankle during a routine drill after tripping on uneven ground at Porth Fire station in Wales. The dangerous area, which the FBU say should have been cordoned off, was instead marked with yellow paint, and the training drill involved the wearing of masks which restricted vision. The firefighter in question was only able to perform light duties and eventually resigned.

He received £10,000.

Another FBU member received £20,000 compensation after faulty fire station doors jammed causing him to slip and hit his head on a fire engine. The fire brigade had been urged to replace the doors with automatic ones, but failed to do so. The firefighter sustained neck and arm injuries and was in plaster for several months when he could not perform his duties.

Risk at any time

These cases demonstrate that emergency service workers are at risk of injury at any time during work and training, not just at the precise moment when they are saving a life, helping the injured or preventing a crime. They are criticised for reporting injuries that are not sustained in the process of protecting lives and property, but these key workers are exposed to workplace risks like any others and should be

able to claim compensation like anyone else, says the FBU.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: "Firefighters risk their lives every day and endure pain, loss of earnings and sometimes permanent damage. Some have to leave the profession, while others have been killed in the line of duty.

"These are not trivial matters, and there must be compensation for negligence with cases being settled promptly – it is the employers who drag cases out for months on end who are responsible for soaring legal costs, not FBU members who are simply seeking to be compensated in the proper way.

"Firefighters risk death and injury daily, but this doesn't mean they are vulnerable to injury only when they are inside burning buildings. The additional life-threatening risks associated with firefighting should make a case for the

path to compensation for work related injuries to be made clearer, not strewn with accusations that they are somehow seeking illegitimate funds. Their reputation for bravery should not diminish the impact of injuries sustained in non-life-threatening situations. They are not accident-immune super-humans and they shouldn't be expected to shrug off injuries other workers are able to seek compensation for."

Risk assessment

The FBU believes that the vast majority of injuries caused by faulty or out of date equipment could be avoided if employers made improvements to equipment and training and carried out adequate risk assessments. Escalating legal costs would be kept to a minimum if culpable employers admitted liability and settled legitimate claims for compensation swiftly.



Firefighters simulate the rescue of the occupants of three cars and a caravan in a flooding exercise at Holme Pierrepont, Nottingham

MARK LEE/NOTTINGHAM POST

Legal Beagle

Time, as always, is of the essence



Q How long do I have to lodge an injury claim with FBU solicitors Thompsons after an accident?

A The normal time limit for lodging a personal injury claim is three years from the date of the accident or injury. If legal proceedings are not started in court within three years, the case is usually time-barred.

But there are exceptions to that rule.

In the case of work-related disease the three-year deadline usually begins from the date that it was known the disease was potentially linked to the original exposure. This is called the date of knowledge and it can be much later than the date of the diagnosis.

Asbestos-related diseases can take decades to develop and fatal ones, such as mesothelioma, may not be diagnosed until after the sufferer is already very ill or has died. The three-year deadline begins from the date the disease was known to be linked to asbestos exposure, or from the date of death.

Another exception to the rule is if the injured person was a child at the time of the accident. In such cases time does not begin to run until the child reaches 18.

Q Does the three-year time limit mean that I can delay contacting the FBU legal service?

A No. The earlier the FBU's lawyers can start investigating your accident or injury



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

the better. This is because they will need to order medical reports to confirm the nature of the injury and to help establish its cause and the prognosis for recovery. They will also need to contact witnesses to the accident. It is much more difficult for solicitors to prove that an injury was caused by another person's negligence and how much compensation should be payable (which is calculated on such things as loss of earnings and future loss of earnings resulting from the injury) if the evidence has "gone cold" by the time the compensation claim is started.

In some cases members leave it until close to the end of the three-year period. That simply means their case has less chance of success as the solicitor will only have a short period to gather evidence. Clearly less evidence will be obtained in a short period and the lack of evidence to support a case may mean the case fails.

Q How long are any legal proceedings likely to take?

A Every personal injury claim is different and there are no hard and fast

rules about how long it should take. There are protocols that are intended to ensure that both sides in a compensation claim respond to correspondence within certain time frames. Simple claims can be concluded in a matter of months. But in many cases defendants, ie the employer or insurer, ignore the protocols and drag out claims.

This can mean that apparently straightforward claims, which ought to take a few months because it is obvious who was at fault and the medical evidence is clear, can take much longer.

Complex injury claims, where the long-term prognosis may not be known for some time, or disease claims where there are many possible sources of exposure, can take years to reach settlement simply because it is some years before the severity of the injury and its impact on future earnings can be established.

It will help to speed up your claim if you can help your solicitor with key information about your accident, such as dates, the names of witnesses, whether it was recorded in the accident book and if there had been previous similar accidents.

You should also keep records of all expenditure related to your claim, such as receipts for taxis to and from hospital and your GP and for payments for help around the house, all of which can be included in your compensation claim.

'I never thought I'd be fighting fires in the world's biggest rainforest'

Neil Fairhall from West Sussex took on the Amazon and the cameras

When Neil Fairhall joined up to fight fires in Sussex, he never expected he would be beating out blazes in the Amazon rainforest, alongside naked tattooed men.

But that is just what he ended up doing – filmed by a BBC camera crew as part of the series *Toughest Place To Be A ...*, shown in Britain earlier in the spring.

Soon after landing in Brazil, he found himself spending three days with the Kamayurá people, who live in the Xingu Indigenous Park, deep in the rainforest. It was certainly a long way from Haywards Heath where Neil, 34, is usually stationed. It turned out to be the highlight of an astonishing and memorable trip.

TV producers picked Neil from more than 2,000 UK firefighters who filled in an online form to audition for an adventure of a lifetime – destination unknown.

Fancy dress

"I attached a picture of me in fancy dress. They rang back half an hour later, and arranged to come down," says Neil, who did not know he would be heading for the rainforest until six days before he set off.

Neil was taken to meet the Kamayurá people by his rainforest hosts in Mato Grosso state, Edimar Dos Santos Abreu, fire chief of Jatoba fire brigade, and his crew. In the midst of the dry season, they travelled thousands of miles up country to teach the Kamayurá

people firefighting skills, in temperatures as high as 35°C. There were no fire pumps: flames were battered down by fierce blows from beaters.

Neil has used beaters to fight fires in very different circumstances – putting out "small smothery type fires" back in Sussex by a steam railway.

The rainforest brigade Neil joined covers an area the size of England and Scotland combined. It is funded by Aliança de Terra, a charity set up by John Carter, an American rancher and pilot in Mato Grosso. One of its remits is helping local people deal with the growing threat of fires.

Different scale

Fire risk is on a different scale deep in the Amazon jungle, as Neil was to see at close range. The destruction of forests has fuelled the spread of forest fires, Neil explains.

"In the recent past, fires used to clear land to plant crops would go out naturally because the air was so humid. But the humidity just isn't there to quell fires, because of logging and forest clearances. So fire travels longer."

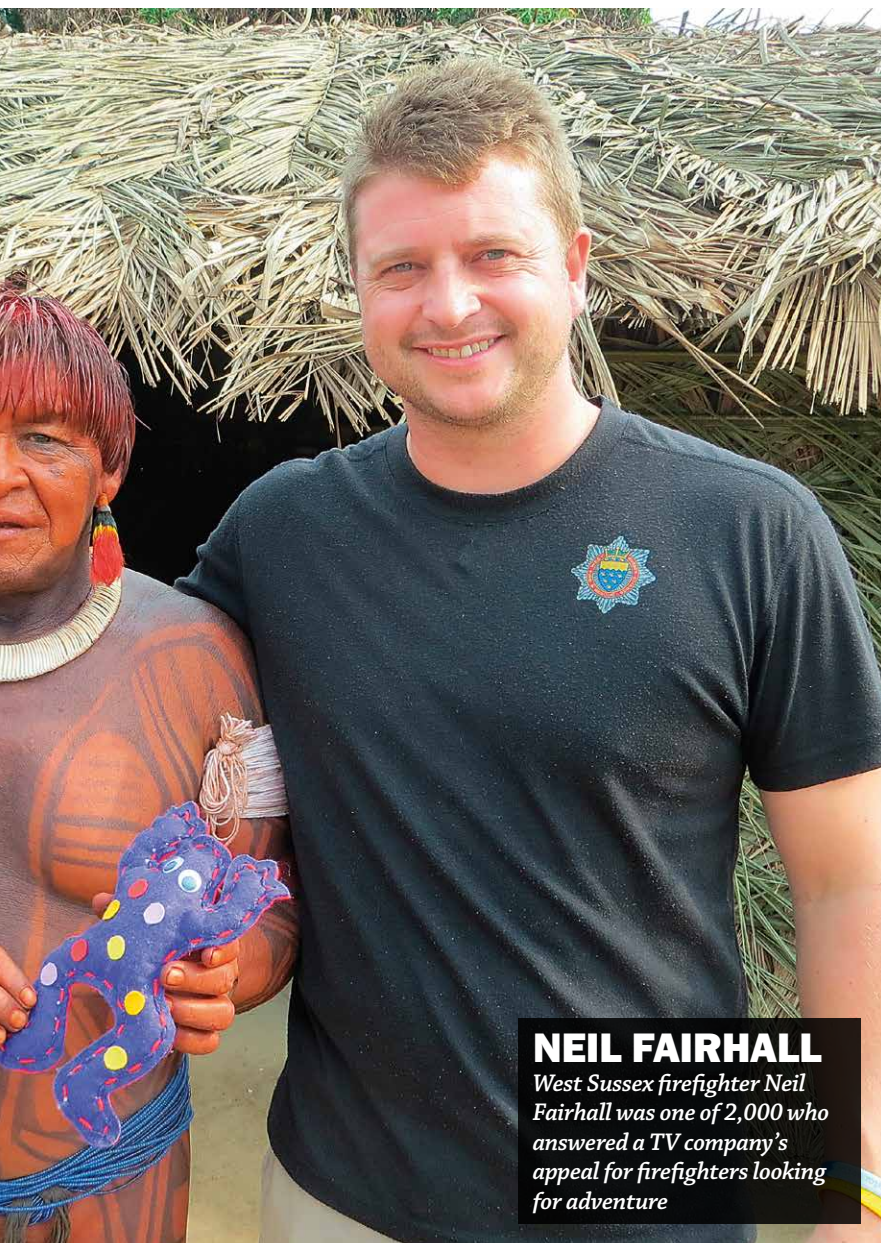
While flames can sweep unchecked through vast swathes of forest there are no building fires, because, huts apart, there are no buildings. "Fires in huts are rare," says Neil. "There are no cigarettes; people don't cook inside; there's no electricity, so no fires caused by electrical faults."

The Sussex firefighter soon bonded with his rainforest colleagues, despite the language barrier, and was struck by how happy and contented these people were: "No worries, no taxes – no shopping. When people needed food, they just went down to the river to catch



No water, no pumps, just beaters to tackle fires in an area the size of Scotland and England combined





NEIL FAIRHALL

West Sussex firefighter Neil Fairhall was one of 2,000 who answered a TV company's appeal for firefighters looking for adventure



fish. No fuss, no stress – it was a really nice change.”

And, of course, no clothes. Neil recalls handing out fire kit to the bemused Kamayurá people – who understandably struggled to get the hang of putting on trousers.

Once firefighting shifts were over, he loved sleeping in a hammock – “I’m getting one next summer” – and soon got used to the local wildlife, which included “spiders the size of my face. All the creatures seemed to be ginormous.”

Camaraderie

Despite the language barrier, bonding came easily, as he worked alongside his new rainforest colleagues. Camaraderie among firefighters seems a given, wherever they are in the world. “It was a brilliant experience, the people were amazing, they were great guys. I never thought I’d be fighting fires in the world’s biggest rainforest.” He took photos of work with colleagues at Haywards Heath, pictures of fire engines and life on the watch.

As a mark of respect, the Kamayurá people covered Neil’s chest and back with patterns, using juice from forest plants. Which was a bit of a shock for his wife



Fire is on a different scale in the Amazon jungle. In the recent past, fires that were used to clear land to plant crops would go out naturally because the air was so humid. But because of logging and forest clearances, the humidity is no longer there, so fire travels further and lasts longer



Despite the language barrier, bonding came easily as Neil worked alongside his new rainforest colleagues.

Karrie when he got back home. He didn’t immediately share with her that they would fade in weeks.

Neil has forged strong links with the rainforest. He Skypes the charity regularly and is thinking of possible fundraising ventures. He’s keen to take his son, Freddie, now 18 months, to see the rainforest when he is older.

Starting to happen

The programme seems to have “gone down very well in South America”, Neil reports. “Some things are starting to happen off the back of the programme. People can understand the plight of people a bit more. The Jatoba fire brigade isn’t that well known because it’s a charity, not the government fire service.”

Raising awareness at home and abroad – and having a once in a lifetime experience – Neil is certainly glad he filled that online form in – and inevitable joshing from his workmates comes with the territory. He wouldn’t have it any other way.

And just what was the fancy dress he was wearing in the photo he attached to the online application form that so impressed the TV producers? I think we should be told.

Prize quiz



Win Evans Cycles vouchers

To win two £50 gift vouchers for Evans Cycles please send your answers by 30 June 2013 on a postcard to: Prize Competition (May/June 2013) FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE. Please include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.

1 As a barrister what did Thatcher specialise in?

- A Taxation law
- B Rightwing capitalism
- C Morally bankrupt ideological views
- D The demolition of social conditions

2 In what government position did Thatcher become the 'milk snatcher'?

- A Education secretary
- B Prime minister
- C MP for Finchley
- D Junior minister for pensions



3 In the mid-1980s, Thatcher referred to Britain's strongly unionised coalminers as?

- A The enemy within
- B Our friends in the North
- C Bastions of conservatism
- D The finest people you'll ever know

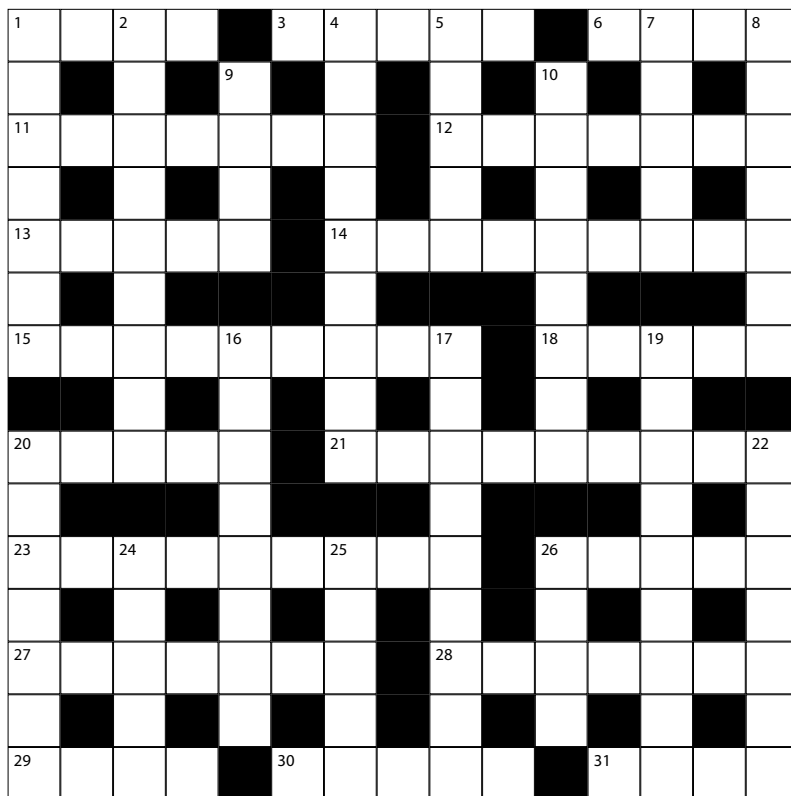


4 Thatcher said her policies would bring down unemployment. When did the unemployment rate fall below the level she inherited in 1979?

- A 1981
- B 1984
- C 1993
- D The next century

5 "Why should a duke pay more than a dustman?" is a rhetorical question referring to what tax introduced by Thatcher?

- A Income tax
- B Poll tax
- C VAT
- D Tax on alcohol



CROSSWORD

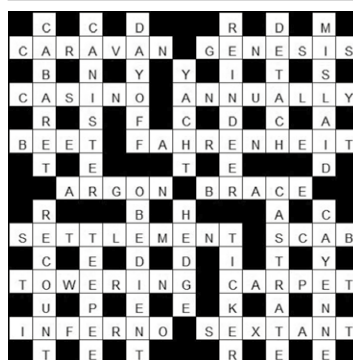
ACROSS

- 1** Object used in ice-hockey (4)
- 3** Our 'mains' weapon! (5)
- 6** What trees and canines have in common (4)
- 11** Lose it completely:
----- rave (4,3)
- 12** Mad, informally (7)
- 13** Throw out (of home) (5)
- 14** Woodworker (9)
- 15** Carry from A to B (9)
- 18** Innards, in a foody way (5)
- 20** 3 vapour (5)
- 21** The one who carries the can (9)
- 23** Make red in the face (9)
- 26** Teacher (5)
- 27** Keep from harm (7)
- 28** Burn or rust (7)
- 29** Grass - used in woodwind instrument (4)
- 30** Supernatural Norse creature - who hounds you on the net? (5)
- 31** Zilch (4)

DOWN

- 1** Unblemished (7)
- 2** One on the ballot paper (9)
- 4** Daring (9)
- 5** Glowing fiery remain (5)
- 7** Avoid (5)
- 8** Raptor, member of falcon family (7)
- 9** Thespians, collectively (4)
- 10** Container of letter (8)
- 16** County east of Devon (8)
- 17** Fungus used as furniture by amphibian (9)
- 19** Icy undoing of Ranulph Fiennes (9)
- 20** Overnight 15? (7)
- 22** Missile launched into 3 (7)
- 24** Alcoholic beverage(s), informally (5)
- 25** One of 9 (5)
- 26** Work (4)

Last month's answers and winners



Crossword solution April

March quiz answers

- 1** A - Red
- 2** D - Sled dog racing
- 3** B - Italy
- 4** C - Russia
- 5** A - 1927


Winner of the March quiz

P J Higgins, Neston, Cheshire


Station Cat

Boasts, busts and a boss's low pay blues

If you can't do it, blog it

 Brian Coleman, once chair of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, now divested of all political office and awaiting trial on assault charges, claims in his blog that he was "the only politician during the coalition period to have successfully beaten a public sector union following the London fire strike of 2010". In fact, the London Fire Brigade had the sense to keep this silly, boastful man well away from the negotiations, otherwise the strike would still be going on.

Football crazy

 Coleman's blog, as you'd expect, is full of silly boasts like that. The oddest is when the openly gay former councillor boasts that he once slept with an Arsenal striker. He writes: "For someone who has little interest in football, although I did attend Barnet v Port Vale at Underhill a couple of years ago, and once slept with an Arsenal striker, I am not fussed if Barnet survive in the Football League or bothered where they play."

Worshipping from afar

 Margaret Thatcher's death provided Coleman with a chance to blog the sort of "Margaret and me" piece beloved by name-droppers everywhere. "I last saw her about a year ago having lunch in the excellent restaurant of the

Goring Hotel near Buckingham Palace," he says. No doubt he did see her, from a distance. Whatever you think of Thatcher, she was too bright to get too close to an ass like Brian Coleman. If you want to find out what else this puffed-up braggart has to say, the blog's at thekingofblingisback.blogspot.co.uk.

Fallen AssetCo

 John Shannon, former chief executive of AssetCo, is facing bankruptcy, the Cat's friend David Hencke exclusively reveals on his famous blog. Shannon got gullible London Fire Brigade senior management to give AssetCo a contract to service and replace London's fire engines. He got a similar contract for Lincolnshire, and another to supply cheap labour to replace striking firefighters in the capital. He made a mess of all of them. AssetCo went to the brink of bankruptcy leaving a trail of unpaid bills – one for the use of a personal executive jet. His bank now owns London's fire engines, and, adds Hencke: "Small shareholders who were daft enough to bet on privatisation as a one-way ticket to riches were ruined."


Shannon took a £300,000 a year salary, plus twice that in bonuses. He also took out loans of over £500,000 in AssetCo's name on other failed

businesses and overvalued property. But the gravy train has hit the buffers. He failed to get a Bahrain bank, Arcapita, to take over the firm. And Hencke has now discovered that Shannon's creditors have lost patience and are petitioning to make him bankrupt. His seven-bedroom Northern Ireland mansion (*below*), set behind electric gates and in seven acres of grounds, is up for sale for £750,000.

Never apologise, never explain...

 Fire minister Brandon Lewis has sold off the Fire Service College. It will apparently be much better if Capita runs it. Why should this be so? Here's Mr Lewis's answer, in its entirety: "I believe that by freeing the college from the constraints of government ownership, a private sector owner like Capita will have the freedom to generate new business and provide the innovation and investment which the college needs to safeguard its long term future." Why this should be so, when it hasn't been so for any previous privatisations, is something he does not explain.

... never learn from others ...

 So what's it like, this company that's apparently going to make the Fire Service College a lot better? Does it deserve the name "Crapita" bestowed on it by *Private Eye*?


The Goring Hotel near Buckingham Palace – where Brian Coleman watched Margaret Thatcher eat lunch

PA PHOTOS



The magazine *Inside Housing* reported: "Lambeth Council dumped Capita following a scathing Benefit Fraud Inspectorate report three years into a seven-year contract. The council's threat to sue Capita for up to £18 million has been dropped so the service can be brought back in-house more quickly."

... and never look back

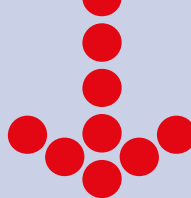
 Harrow Council, which outsourced its IT to Capita, has had no end of IT problems, with "thousands of emails delayed or seemingly lost in the ether", according to Cllr Susan Hall, leader of Harrow Conservative Group. Cllr Hall added: "You could email senior Labour councillors to complain about all this, of course, but there's no guarantee your emails will get through." Cllr Hall sits on the London Fire Authority. Maybe she will remember this when another privatisation wheeze comes before her.

Capita's low pay scandal

So – wondered the Cat – where does all the money that the public sector hands over to Capita go to, if not to improve services? Here's a clue. In December 2010, the *Daily Mail* reported: "Paul Pindar, chief executive of Capita, was upset by a leaflet handed to him at the company's London headquarters which claimed he was on a £9.8 million pay and benefits package. Mr Pindar, 51, told workers he was only paid a weekly wage of £14,500."



25-year badges



Steve Hare (l), Arnold, Nottinghamshire, receives his 25-year badge from region 6 executive council member Dave Limer



Keith Pascoe (l), Devon and Somerset training centre, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Andy Gould



Colin Knowles (r), red watch, Aintree, Merseyside, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Les Skarratts



Andrew Connolley (r), red watch, Rawdon, West Yorkshire, receives his 25-year badge from station manager Nigel Atkins with red watch looking on



Paul Mellors (r), Arnold, Nottinghamshire, receives his 25-year badge from region 6 executive council member Dave Limer



Nigel Atkins (r), Rawdon, West Yorkshire, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary David Williams with red watch looking on



David Bance (r), Devon and Somerset training centre, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Andy Gould



Steve Goodsell (l), green watch, Reigate, Surrey, receives a 25-year tankard from membership secretary Nigel Burchill



Ali Paterson (l), Community Safety HQ, Fife, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Scott McCabe



Mark Wortham (r), red watch, Moortown, receives his 25-year badge from West Yorkshire brigade secretary David Williams



Jeff Rook (l), white watch, Yeovil, Devon and Somerset, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Brad Atkinson



Dave Marsh (l), Crownhill, Devon and Somerset, receives his 25-year badge from brigade organiser Andy Gould



Andy Corke (c), Shoreham-by-Sea, West Sussex, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Richie Coomber (r) and branch secretary (l) Pete Cockram with (l-r) Bernard Broadway-Mann and Rod Gates

Please send photographic prints or digital picture files to: Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk. Please include full details for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/brigade/watch etc; where they are in the picture (eg: left to right); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.

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Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Organiser of any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE 0808 100 6061

The line provides advice for personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.

For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.